

United States Senate Committee on
**AGRICULTURE
NUTRITION
& FORESTRY**

U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman

Specialty Crops & Local Food Systems

The Agricultural Act of 2014

The 2014 Farm Bill recognizes the diversity of American agriculture and the importance of providing access to healthy foods by strengthening programs that focus on fruits, vegetables and organic crops. Sales of specialty crops total nearly \$65 billion per year, and organics are the fastest-growing segment of agriculture, making them a critical part of the U.S. economy and an important job creator.

Strengthens Programs for Farmers Producing Specialty Crops

The Farm Bill provides disaster relief to specialty crop growers hurt by extreme weather who did not have access to crop insurance, and will expand access to crop insurance to protect growers from weather disasters going forward. The bill strengthens specialty crop block grants, which go to states to support research and promotion of fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops. The bill also directs funding for multistate projects like coordinated efforts to improve food safety or stop regional pest and disease threats. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative is strengthened to continue key research projects for fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops, including plant breeding, technology innovation and production efficiency.

Supports Growing Organic Farm Sector

The bill continues assistance to organic producers with dedicated organic research funding, critical data collection on organic markets, and assistance for farmers transitioning into organic agriculture. The bill also improves enforcement of organic standards to ensure consumers have confidence in the organic products they purchase.

Expands Opportunities for Local and Regional Food Systems

The bill strengthens support for farmers' markets and expands authority to support innovative local food enterprises like food hubs. The bill also supports local food projects like urban greenhouses, community gardens, and community-based nutrition education for low-income families that help address community food security and support local economies. It requires the Department to develop a system to more accurately value local and regional foods, and to incorporate that system into its loan programs, improving access to credit for local and regional producers.

Increases Access and Affordability of Healthy Food Options

In both urban and rural low-income communities, many people lack reasonable access to nutritious and affordable food. The bill authorizes the Healthy Food Financing Initiative to administer loans and grants to improve access to healthy foods in these "food deserts." The bill also expands access to healthy options with initiatives that give low-income individuals incentives for purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables and by allowing Community Supported Agriculture operations to be authorized to accept SNAP.

Promotes Better Health for School Children

The bill continues the successful Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Program, which provides fresh fruits and vegetables to elementary school children throughout the school day in school districts with a high proportion of low-income students. It also continues the Department of Defense Fresh Program, which distributes fruits and vegetables to schools and service institutions, and continues to allow the Agriculture Marketing Service to conduct pilots to allow states to source locally grown produce. It opens up grant funding to gleaners, improving access to healthy foods for underserved populations.